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CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES IN LACTATION

The CDC Guide to Breastfeeding Interventions

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The CDC Guide to Breastfeeding Interventions, is a new resource for breastfeeding, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. This document provides state and local community members information to choose the breastfeeding intervention strategy that best meets their needs.

It provides a comprehensive collection of current, evidence-based information on breastfeeding programs and interventions. Each chapter includes resources, strategies and potential action steps geared toward increasing breastfeeding initiation and duration in the United States. The document can be accessed on the Internet at www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding.

[breastfeeding](http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding). Printed copies may be requested from bfguide@cdc.gov.



Regional Variation in Public Opinion About Breastfeeding in the United States

by Martha Hagen, MS, RD/LD

A recent study published in *Human Lactation* indicates that there is a large geographic variation in public attitudes toward the health benefit of breastfeeding, breastfeeding in public, and breastfeeding duration in the United States. In this study data from the 1999 to 2001 Healthstyles survey was used to map regional variations in public opinions. The Healthstyles survey is a mailed survey that has

been administered since 1995 and contains a series of health-related questions. The questions used to examine breastfeeding knowledge were (1) "Breastfeeding is healthier for babies than formula feeding" and (2) "Feeding a baby formula instead of breast milk increases the chances that baby will get sick." The questions used to evaluate opinions about breastfeeding in public were (1) "I believe women should have the right to

breastfeed in public" and (2) "It is appropriate to show a woman breastfeeding her baby on TV programs." Public support for breastfeeding policies at work was evaluated using the questions (1) "I believe employers should provide flexible work schedules, such as additional break time for breastfeeding mothers" and (2) "I believe employers should provide extended maternity leave to make

it easier for mothers to breastfeed.” Public perceptions about the introduction of complementary food and breastfeeding duration were examined using the questions (1) “Babies ought to be fed cereal or baby food by the time they are three months old” and (2) “One-year-old children should not be breastfed by their mother.”

The Health styles questionnaire was mailed to 3554 participants in 1999 with a response rate of 74 percent. Ninety-seven percent of those returning the survey answered at least one breastfeeding question. Similar response rates were obtained in 2000 and 2001. The writers acknowledge that this study does have some limitations. First, respondents to the questionnaire are those willing to complete a long list of questions in their homes and may not be representative of the entire population. Second, the sample size was too small for mapping by states, therefore the U.S. Census Bureau regions were used in this study. Third, there was no direct evidence of the impact of public opinion on women’s actual breastfeeding practices.

The study showed large geographic variation in: knowledge about the health benefits of breastfeeding, approval of

breastfeeding in public, and perceptions about breastfeeding duration. There were relatively small geographic differences in public support for breastfeeding policies at work. Across all regions, a large number of people believed that employers should provide flexible work schedules and extended maternity leave (44-54 percent.) More than half of the population surveyed in each region agreed that breastfeeding is healthier than formula feeding although few people in each region accepted that formula-fed infants were at increased risk of illness. This finding suggests that the American public seems to agree that breastfeeding is healthier but disagree that formula-fed babies are sick more often. Breastfeeding promotion needs to educate people about the health benefits of breastfeeding and increase awareness about the adverse consequences of not breastfeeding.

Agreement with the statement “I believe women should have the right to breastfeed in public” ranged from 37.2 percent in the East South Central Region (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee) to 58.8 percent in the Mountain Region (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyo-

ming.) However, agreement with the statement “It is appropriate to show a woman breastfeeding her baby on TV programs” was much lower varying from 20.4 percent in the East South Central Region to 36.1 percent in the Mountain Region. The authors concluded that it is important to encourage the media to portray breastfeeding as a normal, desirable, and achievable activity.

Perceptions about breastfeeding duration varied greatly. Results from this study indicate that early supplementation and early cessation of breastfeeding are the norm in the United States. “If mothers are told by their family and friends that their baby should be fed solid foods within the first few months and should not be breastfed more than one year, those mothers will find it difficult to exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months and continue breastfeeding for at least 12 months, despite current health agency recommendations.” Further studies are needed to learn why some regions are so positive in overall attitudes toward breastfeeding and other regions so negative.

Abeda Hannan, BS, Ruowei Li, MD, PhD, Sandra Benton-Davis, RD, and Laurence Grummer-Strawn, PhD *Human Lactation* 2005;21:3:284-288



Few people surveyed accepted that formula-fed infants were at increased risk of illness.

BREASTFEEDING ACCEPTANCE UP

BY Aimee Gross ARNP, IBCLC

The Department of Health and Human Services in conjunction with the Ad Council launched the National Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign in June 2004. The campaign relied on public service announcements on radio, TV and the print media to get the breastfeeding message across. The focus of the campaign was to stress the importance of exclusive breastfeeding at initiation and for six months.

The campaign surveyed almost 1000 people before and after the campaign was launched. The results were:

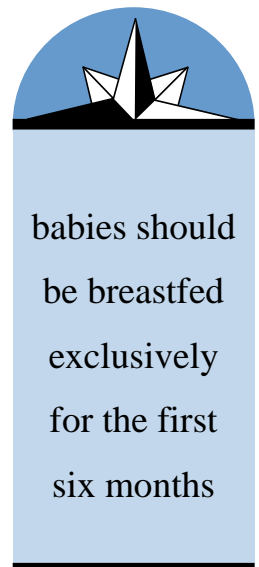
- Significantly more people felt that breastfeeding was the best way to feed a baby in 2005 (64 percent) than the previous two years (54 percent in 2004 and 39 percent in 2003).
- In 2005, 59 percent of women and 65 percent of men agreed that babies should be breastfed exclusively for the first six months, up from 55 percent (women) and 53 percent (men) in 2004.
- 69 percent of men were comfortable seeing a baby breastfed in

public in 2005, compared to only 59 percent of men in 2004.

- Respondents who had seen an ad were significantly more likely to strongly/somewhat disagree that formula is as good as breastmilk (75 percent vs. 59 percent).
- Significantly more women surveyed had breastfed a child in the April 2005 study (73 percent) than in the 2004 study (63 percent).

To learn more about the National Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign, visit www.WomensHealth.gov/campaigns.

This web site was rated number one among all breastfeeding Web sites by the Journal of Human Lactation.



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